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Members Of His Body: Shakespeare, Paul, And A Theology Of Nonmonogamy



Synopsis

Building on scholarship regarding both biblical and early modern sexualities, *Members of His Body* protests the Christian defense of marital monogamy. According to the Paul who authors 1 Corinthians, believers would do well to remain single and focus instead on the messiah's return. According to the Paul who authors Ephesians, plural marriage is the telos of Christian community. Turning to Shakespeare, Will Stockton shows how marriage functions in *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, and *The Winter's Tale* as a contested vehicle of Christian embodiment. Juxtaposing the marital theologies of the different Pauls and their later interpreters, Stockton reveals how these plays explore the racial, religious, and gender criteria for marital membership in the body of Christ. These plays further suggest that marital jealousy and paranoia about adultery result in part from a Christian theology of shared embodiment: the communion of believers in Christ. In the wake of recent arguments that expanding marriage rights to gay people will open the door to the cultural acceptance and legalization of plural marriage, *Members of His Body* reminds us that much Christian theology already looks forward to this end.

Book Information

Paperback: 188 pages

Publisher: Fordham University Press; 1 edition (May 1, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0823275515

ISBN-13: 978-0823275519

Product Dimensions: 8.8 x 0.6 x 6 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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"Writing from a historical moment in which gay marriage has refocused debates around religion, citizenship, and sexuality, Will Stockton astutely explores how the concept of "shared embodiment" at the heart of early modern marriage theology manifests in Shakespeare's plays. If Christians marry in order to join the body of Christ, Stockton proposes, then marriage produces not a bounded

couple but a queerly plural, embodied community. From this insight Stockton produces supple, surprising readings of some familiar Shakespearean texts, readings that are wonderfully alive to the perversely non-monogamous marriages that result when we restore God to the shared life of Shakespeare's husbands and wives."--Mario DiGangi, Lehman College and the Graduate Center, CUNY-Writing from a historical moment in which gay marriage has refocused debates around religion, citizenship, and sexuality, Will Stockton astutely explores how the concept of -shared embodiment- at the heart of early modern marriage theology manifests in Shakespeare's plays. If Christians marry in order to join the body of Christ, Stockton proposes, then marriage produces not a bounded couple but a queerly plural, embodied community. From this insight Stockton produces supple, surprising readings of some familiar Shakespearean texts, readings that are wonderfully alive to the perversely non-monogamous marriages that result when we restore God to the shared life of Shakespeare's husbands and wives.---Mario DiGangi, Lehman College and the Graduate Center, CUNY

Will Stockton is Associate Professor of English at Clemson University.

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